



ZELTERBUCUS (ALBICAPUS) Linn. *Capit.*

MELITHREPTUS VALIDIROSTRIS, *Gould.*

Strong-billed Honey-eater.

Hæmatops validirostris, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., Part IV. p. 144; and in Syn. Birds of Australia, Part I.

Eidopsaris bicinctus, Swains. An. in Menag., p. 344. No. 188.—Ib. Class. of Birds, vol. ii. p. 327.

Cherry-picker, Colonists of Van Diemen's Land.

THIS bird, the largest species of the genus yet discovered, is a native of Van Diemen's Land, and so universally is it distributed over that island, that scarcely any part is without its presence. The crowns of the highest mountains as well as the lowlands, if clothed with *Eucalypti*, are equally enlivened by it. Like all the other members of the genus, it frequents the small leafy and flowering branches; it differs, however, from its congeners in one remarkable character, that of alighting upon and clinging to the surface of the boles of the trees in search of insects, after the manner of the Woodpecker and Nuthatch,—not that it can traverse this part of the tree with the same facility; I never in fact saw it run up and down the trunk as those birds do, but merely fly to such parts as instinct led it to select as the probable abode of insects; and it always perches across the stem,—a position seldom, if ever, assumed by the Nuthatch or Woodpecker; I do not, however, consider this habit of sufficient importance to warrant its separation from those with which it is here associated.

The chief food of this species is insects of various kinds, after which it searches with the most scrutinizing care among the flowering gums.

I am indebted to my friend the Rev. Thomas J. Ewing of Hobart Town, Van Diemen's Land, for the nest and eggs of this bird, which I failed in procuring during my stay in that island. Like those of the other members of the genus the nest is round and cup-shaped, suspended by the rim and formed of coarse wiry grasses, with a few blossoms of grasses for a lining; the eggs are three in number, eleven lines long by eight lines broad, and of a dull olive-buff, thickly spotted and blotched with markings of purplish brown and bluish grey, the latter appearing as if beneath the surface of the shell.

The sexes assimilate so closely in size and plumage, that by dissection alone can they be distinguished; the young, on the contrary, during the first autumn differ so considerably from the adult, as almost to induce the belief that they are the young of some other species; having, however, killed them myself at the breeding-place in company with the adults, I can vouch that they are really the young of this bird and of none other. The specimens from which the upper figures in the accompanying Plate were taken, were shot by myself near the summit of Mount Wellington. I may mention that in the vast forests of gums on the banks of the Tamar, this species was equally or even more abundant than in the southern part of the island. I have never seen it on the continent of Australia, neither have specimens been sent from New South Wales or South Australia.

Its song consists of a couple of notes and is not remarkable for its melody.

Crown of the head jet-black, with an occipital band of white terminating at each eye; ear-coverts, chin and back of the neck black; all the upper surface greyish olive, becoming brighter on the rump and external edges of the tail-feathers; wings brown, with a slight tinge of olive; throat pure white; under surface brownish grey; bill black; feet brownish horn-colour; eyes reddish brown; bare skin over the eye white, tinged with bright green.

The young have the bill and feet yellow, but the latter paler than the former, and a circle of the same colour round the eye; the band at the occiput is also pale yellow instead of white.

The Plate represents an adult male and two young birds in the plumage of the first autumn, of the natural size.